

IN THE ABSTRACT:

Please amend the abstract as follows:

--An apparatus and method for treating an intervertebral disc having an inner nucleus [pulpous] pulposus and an outer annulus [fibrous] fibrosus includes a thermal probe defining proximal and distal ends and having a guidable region adjacent the distal end thereof. The guidable region is characterized by having sufficient rigidity to advance within the annulus [fibrous] fibrosus of the intervertebral disc in response to an axial force exerted on the proximal end of the thermal probe while having sufficient flexibility to substantially follow and conform to an azimuthal course defined by the natural striata of the annulus [fibrous] fibrosus. The thermal probe is adapted for connection to a thermal energy source to provide thermal energy to the annulus [fibrous] fibrosus to alleviate pain associated with the intervertebral disc.--